

# Sports

## One last chance

■ Baker seniors Rose Gwillim and Jayme Ramos are optimistic that in their final trip to the state tournament, a strong team unity will result in the Bulldogs' first win in the event since 2006



S. John Collins / Baker City Herald

Rose Gwillim, shown here in Baker's 67-31 playoff win over Seaside on Saturday, will play in her fourth state tournament starting Thursday at Forest Grove.

By Jayson Jacoby  
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Jayme Ramos and Rose Gwillim are a few minutes away from starting their last basketball practice ever at Baker High School, but their thoughts are on a gym more than 300 miles away.

It's at Forest Grove High School.

And it's where Ramos and Gwillim, both seniors, hope to lead BHS on Thursday afternoon to its first win at the girls state tournament in 13 years.

Baker plays Stayton at 1:30 p.m.

This year's Bulldog squad has a wealth of tournament experience, and Ramos and Gwillim top the list.

Ramos will be playing in her third straight state tourney for coach Mat Sand, who is in his fourth season at BHS.

And although this is Gwillim's second trip to Forest Grove as a Bulldog, she has actually played in more state tournament games than any of her teammates.

That's because Gwillim, before she moved to Baker City in 2017, played in two straight Class 2A state tournaments, as a freshman and sophomore, with the Monroe Dragons, a school near Eugene.

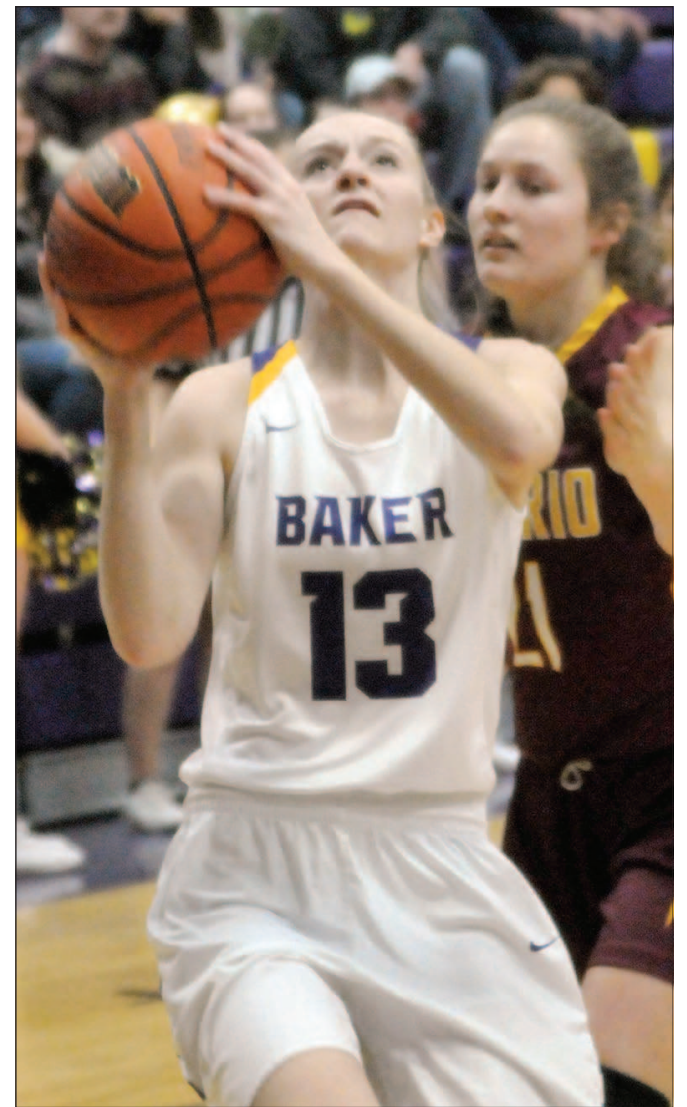
Gwillim, a 5-foot-10 post, was a second-team all-tournament pick as a sophomore when she helped lead Monroe to the state title.

Gwillim, 18, said that although the 4A tournament is a different atmosphere than the 2A event in Pendleton, she feels an extra bit of confidence because she's accustomed to the pressure of tournament play.

"It does help, knowing what it's like," she said.

Ramos, a 5-foot-8 guard, said this year's Bulldog team is different from the previous two squads, each of which lost both of its games at the state tournament.

But the greater experience isn't the only change, she



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Jayme Ramos is ready for her third straight trip to the Class 4A state tournament.

said.

"We're more comfortable with each other — we get along on and off the court," Ramos, 17, said.

The combination of team unity, and a roster with so much experience on the state's biggest basketball stage, should give the Bulldogs a good chance to end their tournament win drought, Ramos said.

Of the 78 points Baker scored in its two losses last year, the players who scored 58 of those points are on this year's roster.

"I feel like we're more prepared this year, mentally and physically, to take the next step," Ramos said. "We know what it takes to play at that level."

Ramos said she feels much different, on the eve

of Baker's cross-state trip to Forest Grove, than she did almost exactly two years ago as a sophomore, as the Bulldogs made their first trip to the tournament since 2006.

"I'm way less nervous this year," she said with a grin, "but still a little bit nervous."

Gwillim agrees with Ramos that this year's team has a sense of shared purpose that feels different from a year ago.

"One thing we really emphasized this year is team unity, and we've definitely accomplished that," Gwillim said. "Coach always emphasizes pushing each other to work hard to reach our full potential, and we've done that."

As seniors, both Gwillim and Ramos said they have strived to serve as leaders for their younger teammates — even though most of them also have state tournament experience.

Ramos admits that role did not come naturally to her.

"I'm typically a quiet person, and I try to lead by example on the court," she said. "But I've become a better leader. I had to step out of my comfort zone to be more of a vocal leader."

Neither Ramos nor Gwillim feel any extra pressure due to Baker's lack of success at the past two state tournaments.

Ramos, who scored 26 points in two tournament games last year and 9 points in 2017, said she is more confident, both because of the team's experience and because the Bulldogs are seeded second, higher than the previous two tournaments.

"Everybody at the next level's going to be good," Ramos said. "We just have to play our game."

But even if they don't feel pressure, both seniors understand that this is their last state tournament.

"We are definitely going to use that to motivate us," said Gwillim, who scored 12 points in Baker's two losses in the 2018 tourney. "We have a blank slate and we want to make a good run."

As she looks around the Baker gym, the polished floor starting to echo with the squeak of sneakers, Gwillim admits that this day isn't like any other.

"It's definitely strange to think this is my last official high school practice here," she said.

Ramos expresses her feelings with a rueful smile — and a single word.

"Bittersweet."



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